The NEED OF CHANGE

JULIAN STREET

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"Did you bring evening clothes?"

THE NEED OF CHANGE

By

JULIAN STREET

AUTHOR OF "MY ENEMY—THE MOTOR"

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To the "Denbeighs"
who, it is fervently hoped, will
never see it,
this book is dedicated
with the apologies of
the Author

The Author thanks the
Editor of
EVERYBODY'S MAGAZINE
for his courtesy in permitting
the use of the story
which is the basis of this book

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THE NEED OF CHANGE

IT was in a little pink inn, sticking tenaciously to a Tyrolese mountainside, that we first met the Denbeighs. They sat facing us at table—an extremely British couple in everything save a disposition to be friendly. On our second day they greeted us with a pleasant "Good morning," and that evening, as Janet and I were sipping coffee on the terrace, Mr. Denbeigh offered me his cigar case, saying, with rapid crisp inflection, a word that sounded like "Smilk?"

I accepted a cigar, and Janet asked Mrs. Denbeigh to show her her crocheting. So we became acquainted.

They were a tall raw-boned pair, suggesting—as human beings often do suggest other animals—upstanding Irish

hunters. Their clothing was invariably black, Mrs. Denbeigh wearing a short serge skirt that hinted at home amputation, and her husband the reversed collar and notched coat that proclaim the clergyman. Temperature and altitude made no difference. Even on our mountain jaunts their costume was the same. If, in its natural urban environment, the uniform ecclesiastical whispers a scanty purse, among the mountain tops it fairly bellows one. That the Denbeighs were in very modest circumstances we considered evident, and we liked them the more for the grace with which they accepted their condition.

Much as we enjoyed the Tyrol and our new-found friends, Janet and I could not forget that we had never been abroad before and might never come again. Europe is a long way from Canal Dover, Ohio. We had only one month left, and a month is none too much time in which to see Venice, Florence, Switzerland, and

France—unless one is a tourist. When the day of parting came, our regret was mitigated by a cordial invitation from the Denbeighs to visit them at their home in Eastherst, an hour's journey out of London. As we were to sail from England, we accepted eagerly. Not only did we wish to see our friends again, but we felt that a visit to a simple little English household would prove interesting,

On reaching London we wrote to them. announcing our arrival, and early the next morning received a telegraphic invitation to "come to them" for the "week end."

Saturday afternoon found us on the train bound for Eastherst. A guidebook which we had purchased at the station helped us to enjoy the brief journey by reading of the places that we passed. The name of the book is "Picturesque Kent," and its author is the Rev. Adelbert G. de P. Crocks, M. A., F. R. H. S., Rector of Biddlington-on-Blye. We had

barely reached Mr. Crocks's descriptions of the charms of Eastherst, when the train stopped there, and we alighted. Carrying our two bags, and followed by Janet, I moved toward the station, wondering if I should find a hack. The only soul in sight was a little footman, very trim in maroon livery and cockaded hat. He came running toward us.

"Mr. and Mrs. Wooley, sir?" touching his hat in typical short-story style.

I admitted it.

"Thank-you-sir," he said telegraphically, giving another salute. "Boxes in the van, sir?"

Boxes in the van—what could he mean?

I must have shown my perplexity, for Janet pinched my arm and murmured: "Trunks," while the man said: "'Eavy leggage, sir."

"Oh, of course, trunks," I said. "No, I have no trunks. Just these two pieces."

He shot me a quick glance, as though surprised.

"Thank-you-sir. This way, if you please, sir." Seizing our bags he waddled off rapidly.

Following up the station steps, we came upon a 'bus and a snappy pair of sixteen-hand grays. The coachman touched his hat so nicely, that before I thought what I was doing, I touched mine. I could have kicked myself! Having put us in, slammed the door, and set our bags upon the top, the footman leaped to his seat as we clattered smartly off.

"This *can't* be the Denbeigh's carriage—?" speculated Janet.

"Of course not. It belongs to one of Denbeigh's rich parishioners," I suggested. "They're sometimes very good to clergymen in England."

We were bowling along a sweet lane. To the right were rows of thatched cottages, to the left a high stone wall, above which rose a row of fine old oaks. After some distance we turned through a

gateway in the wall, passed a stone lodge, the keeper of which saluted, and proceeded along a winding drive bordered with splendid trees. To one side lay a broad reach of turf. In the foreground a flock of sheep grazed; in the distance men were playing cricket.

"It's a park," I said. "Let's look it up in the book."

Janet ran over the pages. "Oh, yes; Eastherst Park . . . Eastherst Hall:

"There is an air of feudal magnificence and solitary grandeur about the castle which neither the ravages of time nor the spoiling hand of man has been able to destroy. Its walls, richly tinted by the tender hand of nature, thrown into relief by magnificent ivy, its beautiful Elizabethan gardens, its imposing façade, its—"

"The Denbeighs probably thought we'd enjoy driving through the place on our way," I interrupted.

"Yes," Janet agreed. "I wonder if we'll see the castle?"

"Does anybody live in it?" I asked, craning my neck in search of walls richly tinted by the tender hand of nature, but seeing only trees—for we had left the lawn behind, crossed a stone bridge, and were winding through thick woods. During this progress Janet had hardly looked up; she was reading busily.

"There it is!" I cried suddenly as we emerged from the trees.

Without so much as a glance at the splendid building, she leaned toward me, marking, with her finger, a place in the book:

"Look!"

"But *you* look!" I exclaimed. "The dickens with the book. There's the *castle!*"

"Yes!" cried Janet, still pointing to the print, "and *there's* the name of the *people!*"

Her voice startled me. I looked—

". . . seat of the eighth and last Earl of Vibart (d. 1884) . . . occupied by his widow

until death without issue (1899) . . . title became extinct . . . estates reverted to Lady Vibart's niece, Miss Probyn . . . married (1901) . . . "

"Go on!" cried Janet, who was watching me eagerly.

". . . married (1901) the Reverend John Arthur Frederick Denbeigh, second son of the right Honourable Sir Richard Denbeigh, K.C.M.G.,M.P., of Denbeigh Court, Stoke-Wetherington, Haversham, Herts."

I had a quick impulse to leap from the carriage and make a run for it—never mind my baggage. But there was Janet—I couldn't leave her to face it out alone.

"Joseph!"

"What?"

"*Did you bring evening clothes?*" Her voice was electric.

"Yes! Did you bring—?"

"My-light-blue-Empire-and-"

The carriage was stopping before the "imposing façade." The footman had

already leaped to earth and was in the act of opening the door. I had the sensation of a rat about to be shaken from a wire trap.

The Reverend Mr. Crocks gives nine paragraphs to the principal entrance to Eastherst Hall, "a great, Gothic arch, crowned by the Vibart wolf-dog carved in stone . . . ." I shall not quote him further. Read his book. You will find that a stone bridge—replacing the drawbridge of earlier times—crosses the old moat, now a sunken garden. Great doors have, likewise, superseded the portcullis. One of these doors swung open as we alighted from the carriage, and two retainers made a rush at us. One took our bags, the other bowed us through the portal. I hoped he did not notice that my legs were shaking. Janet said *she* did.

The hall inside was cool and half dark. I got a vague impression of great space; of huge portraits, massive furnishings—

among the latter a large, solemn gentleman in a dress suit, who approached with a slow, majestic tread, stopped within six feet of us, bowed splendidly and made a proclamation:

"The Rector and Mrs. Denbeigh's compliments, Sir and Madam, and tea will be served in the blue drawing-room at five o'clock, if you please." Then, turning to a footman: "Tate, you will show Mr. and Mrs. Wooley to their apartments."

Without a word, we followed Tate. The floor was slippery, which made me take short shuffling steps, in place of the stately stride that would have suited the surroundings. At the head of a stair two maids awaited us. They escorted us along the corridor and to our rooms.

First we came to Janet's sleeping chamber. It was blue and white throughout—blue satin paneled walls, white furniture and woodwork. In size it was enormous; the tennis court in our back

yard at home, could have been placed in one corner and still leave ample room for the patent clothes driers at either end. Passing through our two dressing rooms—cosy chambers, each covering about an acre—we reached my bedroom. If Janet's was large, what, oh what, was mine! Its area was that of a parade ground. A dark green tapestry hung from the ceiling, to the top of a high wainscot of French walnut. The furniture was of the same wood, heavily carved. The bed was an elaborate four-poster, massive and uninviting.

While the servants remained, Janet and I attempted to wear an air of being barely satisfied with our accommodations. When they departed Janet locked the door, crossed the room, stood for a moment gazing into my eyes, her hands at her sides, her face a study in expression. Then, suddenly, we fell into each other's arms.

"A castle!" cried Janet. "A castle!

Oh, these bedrooms! Mine was made for a French marquise with millions and millions of lovers, and yours is a room for a king to die in, surrounded by weeping courtiers and a regiment or two of cavalry!" She pointed at my bed. "You'll never be able to sleep—never! It looks like a safe-deposit vault! Think of walking right into a castle without having your cane and parasol seized and checked by a uniformed attendant! Think of wandering about floors without narrows trips of canvas and rope railings!"

"For my part," I said, "I rather prefer strips of canvas on the floors—they save one from slipping." I was quite serious, but Janet laughed at this until the tears ran down her cheeks.

"But come on; we had better be unpacking."

"Yes," said Janet, moving toward her room, "and I feel like unwinding a thread as I go, so that I can find my way back again."

My bag was almost empty when there came a rapping at the hall door. Outside was a man-servant, with a long, equine face, solemn as the grave, and short cropped hair, sprinkled with gray. He stood as though expecting to come in. "I am to valet you, sir." (He pronounced it val'-et, not val-ay'.)

"Do you wish to—ah—do it now?"

"May I unpack you, sir?"

Ah! so he wished to unpack me. I was unpacked already, but I knew, at once, it wouldn't do to let him find me out.

"You might come back in a few minutes," I said, with an easy, authoritative air.

"Thank you, sir. Very good, sir." He closed the door. I locked it. There was something austere about him that I didn't like. I was glad he hadn't caught me napping.

I repacked hurriedly, and had just locked my bag when he knocked again. This time I let him enter.

Remembering the fragment of some story in which the hero "tossed his keys lightly to the valet," I wished to toss this valet mine, but something in his solemn face forbade it. I compromised by handing him the keys with a careless gesture. But it was too careless. They fell to the floor. We both stooped to pick them up and bumped our heads together.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said. But I knew *he* knew I should have left the picking up to him. It was stupid of me. I felt angry; angry with myself, angry with the valet, angry with the Denbeighs for letting us believe them simple people like ourselves. By what right had they dressed so plainly? It was deceitful in them. And Denbeigh a minister!

While the valet attacked my bag, I strolled about the room whistling and acting as though I was not conscious of his presence. But I watched from the corners of my eyes, for I was anxious to

profit by the chance to see a valet in the act of valeting.

He produced my Tuxedo, smoothed it, put it on a hanger, and took it to the closet. As he opened the door, a sudden horror gripped me. There, hanging limp upon a hook, was my own bath-robe! He took it down. Despite my consternation, my brain worked rapidly. If I said it was not mine, he would take it. If I said it was, he would see that I had soiled my lily hands with the menial labor of unpacking and—worse yet—packing up again. I decided on the former course.

"There's a bath-gown here, sir."

I looked at it and shook my head indifferently. "Some one must have left it."

"I failed to find your bath-gown in your bag, sir," he remarked.

"H-m," I said. "That's odd—very odd."

He examined the robe.

"This is not Lord Wolfendale's bath-gown, sir," he declared. "That I know. His lordship occupied these quarters last week, sir. I recall that his lordship's bath-gown was brocaded."

"He probably had two," I suggested, looking out of the window.

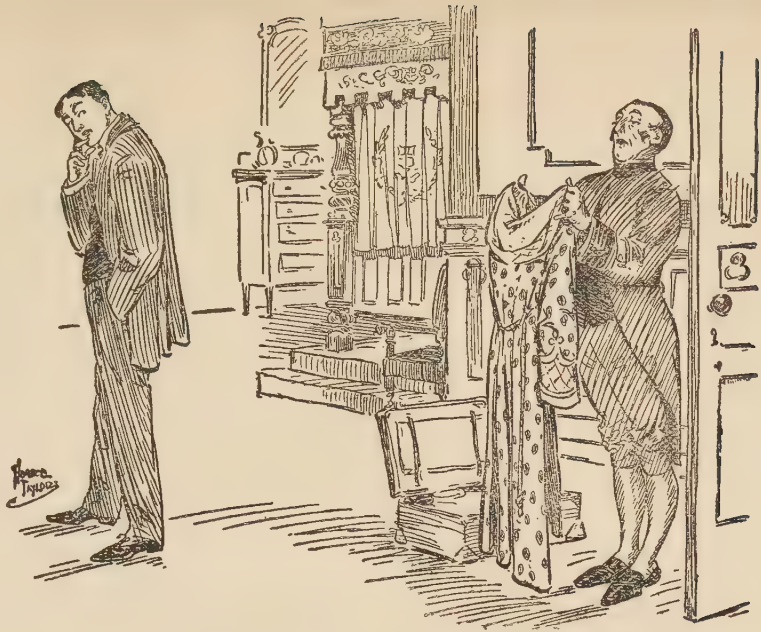
"This bath-gown has the name of an American maker in it, sir," he continued with polite tenacity. "There has been no other American gentleman in Eastherst Hall since I've been here, sir." I distinctly fancied his tone implied: "The old place is going to the dogs."

"Let's see it." I gave up.

He handed me the robe. I turned it over, thoughtfully.

"Well, by Jove!" I exclaimed. "It *is* mine, after all. It's an old one I'd forgotten. Well, well! How in the world do you suppose it got there?" Though this was intended merely as an ejaculation the valet chose to take it as a question.

"Really, sir, I can't say, sir." Some-



"If I said it was *not* mine he would take it."

thing in his manner seemed to add: "Politeness forbids it."

In a last effort to pass the matter off, I mumbled incoherently—I don't know just what—about "Mrs. Wooley" and "neuralgia." I meant to end the matter there, by leaving everything in vagueness. The valet, however, had a disconcerting way of standing at attention when I spoke, thus attaching undue importance to every word I uttered. My final hesitating soliloquy sounded positively idiotic. After waiting to make sure that my maunderings had ceased, he said: "Yes, sir. Thank you, sir," and, picking up my shoes, moved toward the door.

"What time shall I return, sir?"

I wondered what he meant. He talked of coming before he'd even gone.

"What time should *you* say?" I ventured, as a feeler.

"Four, sir?"

"Yes, four—yes, that's a good idea; four. Of course. Four will do very nicely.

"Very good, sir. Thank you, sir. Four."

"Four; yes."

He went out and closed the four—the door, I mean. I locked it. One soon acquires the habit of locking doors on valets. I was extremely nervous. By way of working off my agitation I danced a little, singing in a low voice:

"The door at four;
At four, the door."

In the midst of this performance Janet entered. She was alarmed at first, but I explained. She had been maided—so to speak —while I was being valeted, but had not found the service trying. Women never do. They take to ladies' maids more readily than men do—I mean more readily than men take to *valets*. No able-bodied, self-respecting man can get used to a valet in a single generation. There must be a hereditary taint. But

despite the inconvenience, it is the duty of every self-made millionaire to have a valet, consoling himself, meantime, with the thought that, by doing so, he is building up a family—leaving his sons and grandsons not alone mere money but the nucleus of that taste for laziness and luxury which is recognized as the hall-mark of caste. The son will like a valet; the grandson will positively need one. His nurse will give him over to his governess, his governess to his tutor, his tutor to his valet, who will remain in charge until succeeded by a keeper. You see I'm bitter on the subject. *Why* was my valet coming back at four? And was it four P. M. or four A. M.?

I asked Janet.

"You mean what four and what for?" she suggested.

"Yes, dear. I'll be awfully obliged for any help you can give me."

"He's coming back at four this after-

noon to dress you for tea," replied my oracle. Having spent three years at an expensive finishing school in the East, Janet understands these things.

"To *dress* me! How will he do it? Where do I stop and where does he begin? Am I to lie upon the bed and let him tuck me into my things, or can I help a little by raising an arm or a leg?"

"I don't know, exactly," she replied. "We didn't learn about valets at Miss Spink's. Think of stories and plays. Didn't the valet in 'The Earl of Pawtucket' tie his master's necktie, and turn up his trousers, and—"

"But I don't want my trousers turned up! If he tries to turn them up, I'll kick at him."

"Well, I have to dress," she said, indifferently, and left me to my fate.

Feeling that it would be awkward to have the valet wash me, I repaired at once to the dressing room, and went through my ablutions. For that, at

least, he'd be too late. I was clean, dry, and partially arrayed when, at four o'clock, precisely, I heard his knock.

Donning the disputed bath-gown, I let him in. He bore my shoes and a tall pitcher of hot water. I had understood that the English never use hot water; perhaps he had understood that Americans never use cold.

"Your hot water, sir," he said.

"Thanks, I don't use it," I lied, wishing to show him that, although an alien, I was not unlike the British.

"Thank you, sir. Very good, sir," he returned, putting down the pitcher and seizing the shirt which I had cast aside. After removing the buttons, he placed them in a fresh garment, extracted from the pitifully small supply the bureau drawer contained. Meantime I strolled about, humming and scrutinizing him cautiously. He brushed the suit I had been wearing, and laid it on a chair. This told me that I was not

expected to wear another suit to tea.

"Will you dress, sir?" he asked, taking up the shirt and coming at me.

I didn't move, merely replying: "Oh, yes."

He advanced and, stepping back of me took hold of the collar of the bath-gown. I stood limp and let him slip the garment off. He then raised the shirt and passed it over my head. At this point I helped him by lifting my arms and fumbling for the sleeves. The shirt on, we buttoned it together. I had not meant to help him with the buttons, but, having raised my own arms, I fell into the swing of habit. Our hands interfered most awkwardly.

"Too many cooks spoil the broth," I said, wishing to pass the matter off in jest.

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir." He thanked me for everything—and nothing. It was maddening.

Selecting a fresh collar, he attached

it to the button at the back, and again we struggled jointly over fastening the front. Having begun, I did not like to drop my hands as though acknowledging my error.

Now came the crucial test. Going to the chair, he took up my trousers and came toward me. As he approached, I eyed him as an unarmed man might eye a hungry tiger. Was I to sit down and be pushed into the pantaloons? Was I to jump and alight in them as he held them open to receive me?

He handed me the garments by the top, and stooping, held the legs just off the floor. Ah! That was it! I slipped in handily, and as my feet came through, he dropped the ends. This accomplished, he passed the suspenders over my shoulders and made them fast. I was congratulating myself on this success when: "Which scarf, sir?" he inquired.

I selected one. He passed it through the loop upon my shirt. I waited, but

he did not make a move to tie it. The valet in "The Earl of Pawtucket" tied his master's scarf—that shows how much faith may be put in plays and stories; they aren't like real life at all! Going to the mirror, I made the knot. Meanwhile the man stood by in frozen silence, holding my waistcoat ready. This gave me a disagreeable sense of being hurried; I tied the scarf abominably. Though I wished to do it over, I could not bring myself to keep him waiting longer. Limply I let him put me into my coat and waistcoat.

I was now dressed, so far as I could see. Why was he going to the closet? He reappeared with my Tuxedo suit across his arm.

"I don't find your dress coat or your pumps, sir. I wish to prepare them for this evening, sir."

I have no dress coat. In Canal Dover a Tuxedo answers every purpose. As for pumps I haven't owned a pair since

the days of dancing school. But I knew it wouldn't do to say so now. Trying to look surprised, I exclaimed: "Not there?"

"No, sir."

"Strange—very strange," I murmured in a thoughtful tone, wondering if Bluebeard's closet caused him as much trouble as mine made me. "I must have forgotten them. I guess I'll wear my Tuxedo and patent leather shoes."

"I don't think there's a pair of patent shoes either, sir."

I had said "guess," he said "think"; I had said "patent," he said "paytent," and added "eyther" for good measure. While I was brooding over this, he returned to the closet ("clothes-press") and presently emerged with the shoes I had referred to.

"Here's a pair of paytent *boots*, sir." He held them up.

"They're the ones I meant," I explained. "You call them boots, in Eng-

land, don't you? In America we call them shoes."

"But these are boots, sir." He held them up in proof. Something in his tone seemed to add: "Call them what you like in America, but what they really *are* is boots—*boots!*" Though he had spoken in his usual impassive voice, I had a strange sense of having been shouted down. The American eagle in me gave a cluck of protest.

"I understand perfectly," I began, with dignity, "that over here you call them boots—it had merely slipped my memory. But in America we call the things that come way up here—to the knees, you know, or higher—boots." I felt that my voice was growing shrill and tremulous.

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir. *Top*-boots. But I don't think your top-boots are here either, sir."

"No, no!" I cried hysterically. "I didn't bring top-boots! I didn't mean

that! I was only explaining that *we* just say plain *boots!*"

He was silent; for a moment I fancied that he had grasped my thought. Then: "Very good, sir. Thank you, sir. You'll dress at seven, sir?"

I gave up. "Yes, at seven," I repeated, as one consenting to a tryst.

"Thank you, sir." With the air of a triumphant collector of curiosities, he left the room, bearing my Tuxedo suit, my *boots*, and the major portion of my self respect.

"Boots are boots!" said Janet, later. "There's England in a nutshell."

Together, Janet and I descended the broad hall stair and were guided, by a footman, down a long corridor, at the end of which was situated the blue drawing-room. It was with little pleasure that I now anticipated meeting our friends the Denbeighs. Having been obliged to readjust, entirely, my impression

of their "class," I found myself questioning my first judgment of them generally. Had they really been warm and genial? I was not sure. I felt that I should appear strained before them. But Janet would not, thank heaven! Janet is always at her ease. The one bright spot within my vision was her graceful figure, there beside me, in a cream lace gown. Janet is tall and lithe—a trifle taller (and more lithe, perhaps) than I am. I can't describe her better than by saying that she is the acknowledged belle of Canal Dover, and looks like an illustration from a magazine. At least I had no fears for *her*, as we entered the blue drawing-room.

My speculations on our host and hostess were ended when I saw them. It was as though they had not changed their clothes since we last met, but had, rather, worn them hard. Denbeigh was delightfully baggy, and Mrs. Denbeigh was a cordial, black-clad ironing board.

"Denbeigh was delightfully baggy."

They seemed to leave the trimness to the servants, I thought, as I watched a footman serving tea. During the light repast we revived memories of the funny people of the Tyrolese inn. Later we strolled about the gardens near the house. By the time we parted, to dress for dinner, I was beginning to feel quite at home in Eastherst Hall—castle though it was. But my happiness was short lived. The valet was already in my room. He had my dress shirt in his hands—and presently had me.

Why rehearse again the trials of being dressed? It is enough to say that they were many, and that when Janet knocked, to ask if I was ready to go down to dinner, I informed her that I was. This was true so far as mere clothing was concerned; for the rest, I was hot, nervous, enraged, and helpless.

Once more we descended into the mysterious inferno of down stairs. My boots clumped and creaked at every

step. From the drawing-room door came a sound of many voices. My heart chilled suddenly. It was a party! We didn't know a soul. They would stare at me, at my Tuxedo, at my boots! The sensation was like that of the evil dream in which we find ourselves half-clad and in society. Just outside the door, the feeling came so strong upon me that I stopped short in my tracks.

"Heavens!" I moaned. "What *are* we going to do?"

Janet looked at me indignantly.

"I don't want to go in there!" I insisted.

"Come on!" she ordered.

Like a soldier who hears the word of command, and obeys though it means death, I advanced.

Near the door, Denbeigh was talking with a plump old lady in a white lace cap and a black silk evening gown, décolleté, which set off, rather startlingly, a mass of handsome jewels, a pair of short,

thick arms, and in lieu of neck, a bust.

"As I said to the Duchess, only yesterday," I heard her say, with jerky British emphasis, "one simply can't receive the King. He's all well enough for the biscuit barons, but the older families—"

Can't receive the King! My hands clutched at the bottom of my abbreviated coat. The room swam about me. I gulped, and shuffled onward, vaguely conscious of being led about in Janet's train (and once *upon* it) amid a silence unbroken save for the squeaking of my boots and a battery of names—large alarming names. The names bowed and smiled and said things, and I bowed and smiled, but didn't speak. Even the slight comfort of repeating the names was forbidden by the names themselves. "My cousin, General the Honorable Sir Penge Cricklewood"—it struck my senses like a sand-bag. I should have liked to call him something, but didn't know which part of it to

choose. One after another the names were hurled at me—Lady Swaffield, Lady Cricklewood (a pearl-draped Juno)—Lord Beaufoy (called "Bowfee"; pear-shaped head, blond mustache, and high pink cheekbones)—Mr. and *the Honorable Mrs.* Gerald Poole-Saville (invidious distinction, somewhat counterbalanced by a monocle).

Almost at once, General the Honorable Sir Penge Cricklewood presented his arm to Janet, saying that he believed he was to have the honor of going out to dinner with her. At the same moment Denbeigh came over to me and said: "Will you escort Lady Cricklewood?"

A desperate bravery came over me. Here I was. I must face the matter out. Searching out the blonde Juno, I offered my arm, saying, as I had heard her husband say to Janet: "I believe I am to have the honor," etc.

Momentarily she seemed doubtful; then took my arm without a word. It

was not until we had fallen into line that I discovered the reason for her hesitation. I had presented her my left arm. It was a natural error—for I am ambidextrous—but none the less embarrassing. As the ranks began to move toward the dining room, a happy inspiration came. Allowing the lady's hand to drop, and giving a humorous little leap over her trailing gown, I made the old railroad joke about "changing to the other side of the train."

At this she looked surprised and somewhat blank.

"Don't you see?" I explained. "In the *joke* it's a train of *cars*, but *I* mean the train of your gown."

"Train?" she repeated in a puzzled way. "It must be a kind of pun, isn't it?"

I hastened to assure her that it was.

"Do you Americans enjoy puns?" she asked. "I've heard that you were clever and original."

"Why—yes; that is—"

"My husband makes them," she declared. "You must ask him to make you some. He's tremendously clever and original."

Dinner went fairly well at first. Lady Cricklewood told me some humorous Scotch stories, the points of which I did not catch, owing partially to the difficulties of the dialect, and partially to inattention, for I felt it necessary to listen to the general table talk in the hope of finding out the proper methods of addressing titles.

In this I was disappointed. They seemed to call the Honorable Mrs. Gerald Poole-Saville "Belle"; Lady Swaffield was "Aunt" to the Denbeighs, while General the Honorable Sir Penge Cricklewood was "Cricky." The four footmen, who served, said "Your Lordship" to Lord Beaufoy and "Your Ladyship" to Lady Cricklewood and Lady Swaffield. In a story that was

told it developed that Lady Swaffield was otherwise the Countess of Swaffield, and that her husband was the Earl of the same.

This assorted information was all that I could glean. I was principally concerned with avoiding the necessity of addressing anyone directly. The ices had been served, when my attention was attracted by a burst of laughter from General the Honorable Sir Penge Cricklewood.

"There!" said the lady at my right. "There, Mr. Wooley. You must ask my husband to tell you that one—you really must, you know."

Trying to assume an expression at once pleasant and compelling, I turned an eager face in his direction. He continued to chuckle at his sally, looking about the table for approval. I could not catch his eye.

"He's so clever and original," his wife, declared admiringly.

I was becoming quite uneasy, when:

"Penge," the lady said, "Mr. Wooley is fond of jokes. *Do* tell him yours about the potato clock."

"Certainly!" he cried. "Delighted, I'm sure. Mr. Wooley, did you ever see a potato clock? What?"

I said I hadn't.

"No? Well, I got *up at eight o'clock* this morning!"

He burst into volcanic laughter. I joined, politely.

"And now, Mr. Wooley," said this hero of a thousand verbal slaughters, "You must give us some of your American jokes."

"Yes—yes," said the Countess of Swaffield, fastening a fishy eye upon me. "I have heard that you Americans are very droll. Do tell us some amusing tales."

A hideous silence fell about the table. The whole world seemed to stop, look and listen. My heart pumped savagely

against the bosom of my shirt. My ears sang.

Groping in desperate haste among dusty pigeon-holes of memory, I seized something—anything—and drew it out.

"Well, I don't set myself up as a story teller, you know, but—well, there was once a Frenchman, an Englishman and an American and they were having an argument as to what—"

At this point it struck me that Janet was staring at me strangely.

"—They were having an argument as to what really constituted a joke," I continued bravely.

Janet's face took on a look of horror.

"The Frenchman said that he thought a joke was—"

My wife shook her head violently. There was no mistaking her meaning. I stopped short. In a flash it came to me that this story wouldn't do. It depended on an exaggerated English dialect—on making the Englishman a fool!

"Yes—?" put in General the Honorable Sir Penge Cricklewood, when the pause had lengthened into a break. "What did the Frenchman say, Mr. Wooley, eh?"

"To tell the truth," I declared, blushing to the roots of my hair, "I was trying to remember what he *did* say. You see I don't set up as much of a story teller. I haven't told this one in a long time. Somehow it doesn't quite come to me."

There was an aching silence.

"We must have it later, Mr. Wooley, when you recall it," said Mrs. Denbeigh, with kindly tact.

The male Cricklewood stared for a moment, cast a sidelong glance at Janet, and burst into a roar of laughter.

"Ah, ha!" he said. "I see! I see! Not precisely a dinner-table story, eh? Well, we shall have it with the liqueurs, Mr. Wooley—what?"

He had intercepted Janet's signal and mistaken its significance. Little as I

liked his interpretation, I preferred it to the alternative charge of rank stupidity.

When, shortly after this, the ladies withdrew I devoted all my energies to drawing out the military punster. Tiresome as this occupation was, I vastly preferred it to the paradox of finishing an improper story which had never existed.

After he had smoked one good cigar and made four bad puns, we withdrew to the music room, where the Honorable Mrs. Gerald Poole-Saville and Lady Cricklewood sang French and German songs, which everybody seemed to understand. I was glad of the chance to sit down quietly and merely applaud and smile at intervals; gladder still when the butler announced Lady Swaffield's motor at the door, whereupon the company broke up.

Janet had taken positive delight in it all. I wanted to discuss the situation with her, but as her maid was waiting, I felt obliged to leave her at her bedroom door.

I was rather shocked to find the maid up at so late an hour. The servants ought to be in bed. I hoped my valet was. The thought of being put to bed by him was horrible. I opened the door, and was overjoyed not to find him. As I removed my collar I heard a soft step in the hall; then, at my door, the familiar, dreaded: "Rap, rap, rap!"

I waited in silence, hoping he would go away.

After a moment he knocked again, this time a little louder. It was a compelling knock that could not be ignored.

"Who is it?"

"Herne, sir," came the familiar voice.

"You needn't trouble about me tonight," I said, unlocking the door and looking at him as kindly as I could. "I'm sorry you sat up. I can manage very nicely."

"Thank you, sir. Very good, sir. But I have some water for you, sir." He made as if to come in.

I placed my foot against the door. Once inside, he would not leave until he had undressed me, heard my prayers, and tucked me in.

"Just give me the water," I said, reaching through the narrow opening.

He placed the carafe in my hand reluctantly, I thought, and with a "Good night, sir," closed the door.

Donning the bath-gown of my shame, I made the pilgrimage to Janet's room, intent on talking matters over. She was in the clutches of the maid. Knowing the futility of waiting, I returned to my kingly suite in gloom, and after some silent moments devoted to moody contemplation of the appalling bed I was to occupy, shut off the electric light and clambered in. It proved comfortable—more so than my own reflections.

My dreams were not agreeable. I ran, climbed, jumped, pursued by countless body servants who wished to put me

through an exaggerated toilet. Like the familiar figure in the moving pictures, I fled on through woods, across rivers, up hills and down, through great houses where I rushed from room to room slamming the doors behind me. It was in my own vast chamber that they cornered me at last. I piled the furniture against the door. Outside they yelped and pounded. The door began to give—give. As I rushed for the closet, they burst in upon me. They seized me and—I awoke.

My shriek of terror, as they caught me, was ringing in my ears. I did not open my eyes, but lay there, shivering and thankful. After all, it had been only a nightmare.

This comforting reflection was broken, suddenly, by a sound of stealthy footsteps. A flash of the dream-horror shot through me. I opened my eyes.

By the dresser, motionless, his back turned toward me, stood the living figure

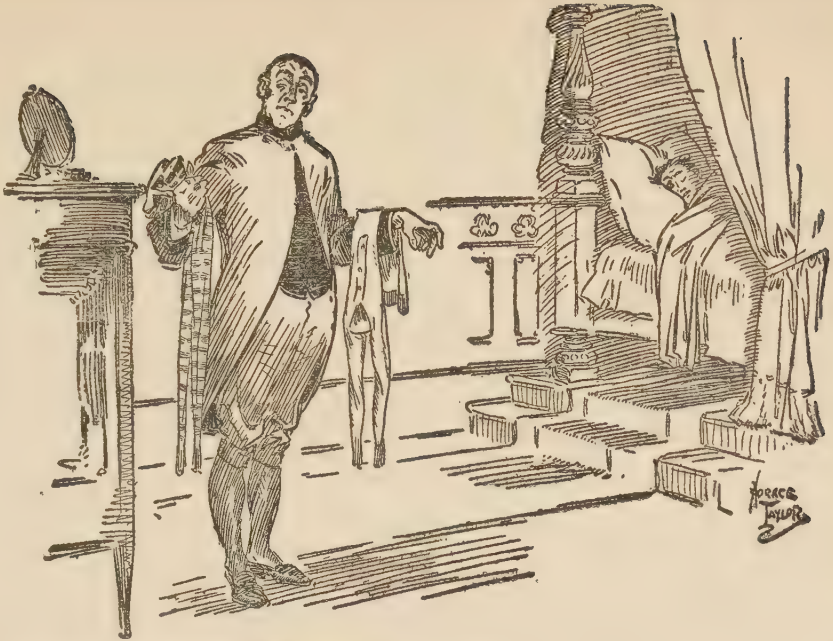
of the tyrant of my dreams. If he had heard the cry I gave at the termination of the nightmare, he believed that I still slept. He was gazing at something, something soft, which he held aloft derisively in his two hands. I recognized the something instantly. It was my underwear—the nether part of a single suit which I had bought in Paris—pink, with red stripes running round and round. Alas! where it had once seemed merely giddy, in the valet's hands it achieved an appearance positively shocking—vulgar, ribald, indecent.

Putting the garment down, the man fumbled the contents of the open drawer before him. Then, with a cynical shake of the head, he drew forth a plain balbriggan undershirt and, placing it beside the other garment, surveyed the ghastly combination.

The horrid truth now burst upon me. The whole pink suit would have been bad enough, but this was worse:

I had only brought a half-portion of it! The man was gloating over the uncanny combination I would have to wear. He would stand by, in grim, insulting silence, and make me put it on!

Contemplation of this new catastrophe plunged me into panic more acute than I had suffered in my dreams. Closing my eyes in pretense of sleep, I struggled with my scattered thoughts. My breath came heavily; I wished to gasp, but feared to draw my servitor's attention. Peeping through my lashes, I saw him bear the depraved garments to the dressing room and drape them gracefully across a chair. Emerging, he moved toward the hall door. This roused a sudden hope. If he went out, I would spring up and turn the key. Why, oh why, had I failed in that precaution ere retiring? The door had been unlocked all night. No doubt he had come in from time to time, to lean, vampire-like and listen to the frightened babblings of my dreams.



"The man was gloating over the uncanny combination I would have to wear."

My back was toward the door and, though eager to see if he had left the room, I did not dare turn over. Listening intently, I heard a rumbling metallic sound; then my tormentor reentered my narrow range of vision, trundling a large tin bathtub. After placing it in the dressing room, he went again to the hall; again I waited, praying that the door might close; again he reappeared, this time with two great metal pitchers. As the water splashed into the tub, a new vista of dismay was opened for me. Would he bathe me? Thoughts of resistance galloped through my mind. I would refuse, point-blank, to rise. I would defy him! But even as I planned, I knew I had not the courage to oppose his orders; orders which a formal drapery of servile language seemed only to make the more imperative.

Emerging from the dressing room, he gazed at me for a long moment, during which I ceased to peep between my

lashes. I do not think he penetrated my 'possum-like defense, for he now ceased to tread quietly and, walking to the door, rapped briskly. My time was come! I turned over, rubbed my eyes, and looked at him.

"Good morning," I let fall in an apathetic voice. "What sort of a day is it?"

"Good morning, sir. Bright and fine. Your bath is ready, sir."

I must trick him into leaving.

"Is my shaving water here?"

"It is, sir." That hope took flight.

"Please give me a glass of water."

Going to the table, he poured a glass from a fresh carafe.

I drank it very slowly, racking my brains for something which he had not already brought. Then, looking at the ceiling as I handed him the empty glass: "Herne," I said, "I'm very fond of flowers. Could you get me a few for that bowl?"

In the brief pause which followed I knew I had defeated him.

"Very good, sir." He moved towards the door. It had hardly closed when I turned the key. Then, slipping out of my pyjamas as I went, I made for the dressing room. My plan was settled. By clothing myself hurriedly and foregoing my bath, I would cheat my persecutor of the chance to see me in the shameful underwear. I snatched the revolting garments from the chair. But no! The clear bath water caught my eye. It would betray me. Time was short, but I must soil the water. Testing the temperature with my foot, I was shocked at the glacial touch. I abominate cold baths, but—ah! a thought. Catching up soap and washcloth, I rinsed them violently in the tub. The result was a gratifying gray. Ceasing only long enough to slip into my undergarments, I repeated the operation. The water now took on a hue so murky that I began to fear that, by discoloring it too much, I had opened a new field for the valet's speculations on my habits. As a

final touch of realism, I spattered water on the mat and towels. This accomplished, I resumed my dressing, conducting it with such dispatch that the detested "Rap, rap, rap!" found me safe in shirt and trousers.

I fancied that I detected a fleeting look of disappointment in the equine eyes as they observed the progress I had made. After placing the bowl of roses on the table, Herne assisted me, silently, with the remainder of my toilet. During this, I paused occasionally to make excursions to the bowl of flowers, gazing and smelling at them like an impassioned horticulturist. When, at last, there was absolutely nothing more to do, Herne left the room—reluctantly, I thought.

Sinking into a chair to review the situation, I was now struck by a new thunderbolt of apprehension. I rose quickly and, after taking the usual precaution, hastened to the dresser. My worst fears were confirmed by a brief investigation of its con-

tents. There was not another undergarment there.

Bad as was the last dilemma, this one was infinitely worse. The thought of wearing a suit of underwear a second time while staying in a castle, was incongruous, but that of being valeted into my present ill-assorted suit again upon the morrow, was insupportable. Aside from its outrageous coloring, it would lack even the pitiful excuse of freshness. What was to be done? Time would go on in its inexorable flight. To-morrow's sun must rise, and so must I. There was but one course open. I decided to pursue it.

When Janet entered, ready to go down to breakfast, I was laying plans.

"Good morning, dear," she cried. "You ought to have been out hours ago. It's a gorgeous day. I've been in the rose garden with Mrs. Denbeigh, and I've such a surprise for you—"

"Good morning," I replied, rather peevishly, I fear. "You ought to knock

before coming in, Janet. You startled me. I thought it was the valet."

"I see you have indigestion again," she remarked, I thought irrelevantly.

"Nothing of the kind!" I had meant to tell her all, but the conversation had not opened propitiously.

"Oh, yes. I know your symptoms."

"I need a sea voyage, or something," I began.

"You'll have one next week."

"I need it now, though. This place doesn't agree with me."

"Take this instead," she said, handing me a digestive tablet. "And just wait until you hear my news!"

Her air of levity pricked me a trifle. I took the tablet gloomily.

"What news? Are we going?"

"Going! Just the opposite! We're to stay over for the County Ball, to-morrow night. Isn't it *great?*"

I couldn't speak.

"Why, Joseph!" she cried. "You don't

look pleased. Just think! It's the great event of the season. We'll see *every* one. There'll be a duke and duchess there—I mean to dance with the duke, too! Why, we'll—"

"Janet," I began, solemnly, but she cut me short.

"Oh, come on down to breakfast. You'll feel better afterwards."

My mind was made up. Janet liked Eastherst Hall, and fitted it. She could go to the County Ball. For my part I should act, and act alone. The valet would harass me no more. No county families, no duke and duchess, should gaze upon my Tuxedo and my boots, unless they came to Canal Dover!

Sad, but determined, I rose and followed Janet down to breakfast. It proved to be one of those fine old English meals, comprising eggs and bacon, scones, marmalade, and tea with rich cream. Just the breakfast that I like. But Janet's statement that I had a bad

attack of indigestion wanted bearing out. What I had was only tea and toast. I don't like tea and toast.

"I know all about this Sunday morning indigestion," smiled Mrs. Denbeigh. "You may stay home from church, Mr. Wooley. That will cure it."

"Oh, no, indeed," I said. "I *want* to go to church. I don't wish to miss Mr. Denbeigh's sermon."

"What is the sermon to be about?" asked Janet.

"Your husband's namesake, Joseph, and his coat of many colors," he returned.

I felt the warm blood mount to the roots of my hair. Of course mine wasn't a *coat*, but it was certainly the next thing to it.

"Why, Joseph!" cried Janet. "You have a *face* of many colors now. What is it?"

"I'm a little feverish, I think."

At this Mrs. Denbeigh said it was settled that I should not go to church.

"Herne will stay at home and see to you," she added. "He's excellent in a sick room."

"No, no!" I cried. "I wouldn't think of breaking in on the poor fellow's Sunday —not for worlds! I'm not really ill; only indisposed. Perhaps I *had* better stay here, but *he* mustn't—no indeed!" I feared for the moment that I had been too vehement. Would they suspect me, later, when—? I said no more. The question was allowed to drop, on the understanding, I took it, that I should stay and Herne should not.

My scant meal over, I retired, hungry, to my room and cast myself into a chair. Even the prospect of escape was powerless to cheer me. Life looked a gloomy thing at best. I remained in the depths of the chair until I heard carriage wheels upon the drive, which told me that the rest had gone.

My time for action was at hand. Rising, I hastily collected my belongings and

placed them in my bag. Then, after consulting a time table, I scrawled a hasty note to Janet.

"'Going to London. Tell them I was sick. Don't worry. Am all right. Will explain later. Expect you on train arriving Victoria Station about noon Tuesday.

"With love,

"JOSEPH.

"P.S.—Be sure to tip all servants well."

Sealing the envelope, I placed it on Janet's dresser. Then I opened the hall door and listened. The house was silent.

Taking up my bag, I tiptoed to the stairs and peered into the hall below. Deserted. I descended stealthily, step by step, and was making for the outer door when another portal opened suddenly, and I found myself face to face with Herne!

In looking back on this occasion, I am astonished at the coolness I displayed.

"I thought you were at church, Herne."

"No, sir, I——"

"Herne," I interrupted, "I've been taken ill, quite suddenly, and am going up to London to consult a specialist."

Herne looked politely alarmed. "Very sorry, sir. Might I ask the nature of the ailment, sir?"

"Appendicitis," I fired at random, suiting the word with what I conceived as a grimace of pain, and a twisting of the body.

"In that case," said Herne, "I'm glad to say, sir, that Sir Frederick Bownes has the next place to Eastherst Park. He's one of our great surgeons, sir. Indeed, he makes a specialty of appendicitis, sir."

This would not do.

"The trouble is," I enlarged, "that I'm not certain it's appendicitis. It may be lungs. In fact I was just thinking that the pain came rather higher up, and—" (here I coughed violently)—"you see I cough."

"Yes, sir. But Sir Frederick could—"

"You see," I interrupted, resuming my way toward the main doorway, "it would be very unfortunate if Sir Frederick operated on me for appendicitis, and then, after having cut me all up, discovered that it was my lungs, after all. Wouldn't it?"

"Indeed it would, sir. But Sir Frederick——"

"So that's why I've decided to go to London and see my regular specialist."

"Thank you, sir. Of course you know best, sir, but Sir Frederick——"

"Now I must hurry," I announced.

"I'll send for a cart, and will be ready directly, sir." So saying, he calmly dispossessed me of my bag.

"Oh, don't send for a cart!" I protested. "I'll walk. It will do me good."

"They'd have the cart out in a moment, sir."

"I need the walk," I insisted.

"Very good, sir. As you wish. I'll

come along with the bag, sir, after procuring my hat and coat."

"But why? I can take the bag. It's light."

"Of course, sir, I shall accompany you to London."

"No, no!" I cried in alarm. "You mustn't think of it! It won't do at all! I must go alone. I'm perfectly well, except for occasional slight pain, but I'm very nervous—it makes me nervous to have people near! Besides, it may be something infectious. You'd catch it! No indeed, you mustn't come!"

"It would be as much as my place is worth to let you leave alone and ill, sir," he said determinedly. "Mrs. Denbeigh's express orders were that I should watch after you, sir."

Open resistance was clearly useless. I must resort to cunning.

"I'm sure it's very good in you," I said, submissively. "The fact is, I'm feeling much better now. Perhaps I

won't have to go after all. I'll just walk about the rose garden and see how I feel. Then, if I decide to go, perhaps you *had* better——"

"Thank you, sir. Very good, sir. In the meantime I'll fetch my hat and coat, so I shall be ready, sir, at all events."

He started for the door, but, with his hand upon the knob, hesitated. Then he turned back and, taking up my bag, remarked:

"I had best keep your bag by me, sir. Most of the other servants are at church, and strangers have a way of prowling about the park, or even entering the hall itself, sir."

I lost no time in gaining the open air. Not a soul was in sight. The drive stretched out before me like an invitation. Along that line lay freedom. Ah, if I had my bag! Yet have not hundreds of men made long and perilous journeys without bags? And after all, what did mine contain? Merely a few articles of toilet, a

little clothing, and — I flushed — some underwear that had been worn.

I looked at my watch. A scant twenty minutes lay between me and the train. Herne was by this time in the servant's quarters, at a remote corner of the castle. It was now or never!

I started down the drive at a brisk pace, and was soon in the cover of the woods. With the mad feeling of an escaping convict, I quickened my pace to a trot.

On emerging at the other side of the little forest, I slowed to a rapid walk, fearing that I might be noticed. Another glance at my watch sufficed to make me oblivious of appearances. Twelve minutes! Again I trotted on, only slowing to walk as I passed the lodge. The gate keeper surveyed me critically, but saluted as I hurried by.

In the village street I could not run without becoming too conspicuous. I walked rapidly—very rapidly. Presently I recognized the thatched cottages I had seen as

we arrived. How long ago it seemed! What sweet little homes they were! What deliciously untrammeled lives their tenants led; the mothers without maids, the children without nurses, the fathers without valets.

I was in sight of the station when the shrill whistle of a locomotive spurred me on. That train must be caught. If not, *I* should be! I fancied Herne making me captive, dragging me back to Eastherst Hall, stripping me at once of freedom and fantastic undergarments, putting me to bed, summoning the famous British surgeon and robbing me of my appendix—all before the family returned from church. The vision of death was hardly less repulsive than that of a long convalescence, with Herne forever playing nurse. I ran frantically.

The train and I approached the station simultaneously. It had stopped ere I bounded down the steps. As I attained the platform, the carriage doors were

slamming shut; the cars began to move.

I heard a shout behind me. A man upon the platform made wild gestures with an umbrella and called to me to stop. I rushed on. The train gathered speed. A red-faced guard, in uniform, snatched at my sleeve, but with maniacal strength I shook him off. The last car was passing. There was an open window and I jumped for it. My hands gripped the sash; my feet found the footboard. I was on, if not in the train!

Looking through the window, I met the astonished gaze of an old gentleman. He had white side whiskers, and a pleasant face.

"Hello, hello, hello," he remarked. "You'd best come in out of that!"

He extended his hand, and with its aid I scrambled through head first.

He gazed at the receding station, then:

"Hello, hello, hello!" he said. "Friend of yours?"

I looked back. There, upon the platform, stood Herne. My bag lay at his feet. Even at that distance it was plain that he was a very different Herne from the one I had left at Easthurst Hall. His face had lost its stolid, equine expression. It was red and full of wrath. His collar was undone; it stood out jauntily at one side like a wing. He was pointing after the receding train and saying something —something vehement, I judged, from the faint bellowings that reached me, above the rumble of the cars. He seemed to be addressing the world in general, and the guard who had not stopped me, in particular. Was he telling of my underwear . . . ?

Janet telegraphed that she would come to London on the four o'clock train. She did so, bringing my bag and her own opinions.

As we drove across the city, I tried to make an explanation. It was difficult. I had feared it would be.

"I scrambled through head-first."

"But what on earth possessed you to run away like that?" she scolded.

She did not know that certain invisible red stripes were helping her to grill me.

"I simply *had* to have a change," I said.

END

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